

MYŌHONJI

" . . . the solitude, the pillared solemnity of the great trees in the green dimness."

This picturesque and beautiful old temple is the largest of the Nichiren sect in Kamakura ; it is also famed for its historic associations and the tragedy that was enacted upon its site. The long approach begins from the Ebisudō bridge spanning the Namerigawa. After some distance mossy steps ascend to the Niōmon—or gate of the Kings—lying in the deep shadows of noble cryptomeria, whose dark foliage lends a note of solemn and dignified remoteness to this valley, so thickly enclosed with forest-trees and known as *Hiki-ga-yatsu* ; the name originated from the fact that here lived the woman who tended Yoritomo from his infancy, and who came of a family belonging to the district of Hiki in the province of Musashi. The great *Shōgun* naturally cherished the associations of his old nurse, and it is recorded that he frequently repaired to this spot, accompanied by Masako, to visit the family.

The nurse was known as *Hiki-no-ama*, or the Nun of Hiki : here she resided with her adopted son Yoshikazu and his offspring. This Yoshikazu was a samurai of high renown and a special favourite with Yoritomo ; he was also a member of the council of illustrious men that was formed after Yoritomo's death to discuss the affairs of the *Bakufu* or military government, but whose

deliberations were subject to the endorsement of Masako and her father Hōjō Tokimasa. Yoshikazu's daughter, known in history as Wakasa-no-Tsuboné, was the mistress of Yoriiye, eldest son of Yoritomo; she became the mother of Ichiman, Yoriiye's eldest son and also a girl-babe, who is known as *Take-no-gos'io* from the name of her residence.

The loyalty of Yoshikazu to his master led him to organise a scheme that aimed at the destruction of his enemies the Hōjō, whose power was rapidly increasing, and whose aim was to destroy all the Minamoto, replacing them with Hōjō—a state of affairs that was speedily consummated. The knowledge of this plot soon reached Tokimasa's ears, with the result that Yoshikazu was assassinated; a large number of valiant soldiers and partisans also perishing at the same time. This tragedy took place Sept. 2nd, 1203.

On the left of the Niōmon is an enclosure with stone lanterns etc., within which is a small monument. This is the tomb of Ichiman, the baby son of Yoriiye, who was only three years of age when the extermination of the Hiki family took place: certain of the kinsmen of Yoshikazu were slain at Nagoye, Tokimasa's residence, the site of which is in the vicinity of Myōhonji. The remaining members assembled at the abode of Ichiman at Yukinoshita, (another part of Kamakura), but all perished in the attack, including the little heir. On the following day, amongst the ashes was discovered the sleeve of the child's robe. This relic, together with some bones, was buried here and the tomb was erected, which is universally known as the *Sodezuka*, or 'Sleeve-tomb.' Within the small enclosure a memorial stone tablet has been



The Sodezuka,

or 'Sleeve-tomb' of Yoritomo's infant grandson Ichiman, who was burnt to death Sept. 2nd, 1203.

erected in 1904 to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the death of Ichiman, grandson of Yoritomo, and bearing an account of these historical facts engraved upon its surface.

At the time these events took place, the youngest son of Yoshikazu Daigaku Saburo, happened to be in charge of a relative elsewhere, and so escaped the general annihilation. He was taken to Kyōto for greater safety, and there educated; achieving high distinction for his scholarship and the lofty character of his mind. When the Emperor Juntoku (1211—1222) was exiled to the island of Sado he was accompanied by Saburo, who served and attended his Imperial master with great devotion during the period of his banishment. Meanwhile circumstances in the military capital had undergone considerable change: when liberty was restored to this remaining member of the unfortunate house of Hiki, he was able to return to Kamakura. This was the time when Nichiren's activities were at their height. Daigaku Saburo became an enthusiastic convert and layman pupil of the saint, assuming the religious name of *Nichigaku*: the temple is said to have received its name from Nichiren himself, *Myōhon* being the posthumous title of Yoshikazu's wife. On the hill behind the present site Daigaku Saburo built a small place of worship in the year 1260—the *Hokke-dō*—in memory of Take-no-gosho, daughter of Yoriiye and Wakasa, who had escaped the general slaughter when an infant, eventually becoming the wife of Yoritune—kinsman of Yoritomo and successor to the *Shōgunate* upon the death of Sanetomo. At the beginning of the *Meiji* Era this *Hokke-dō* was removed below to the site where it still exists near the lake, and was re-named the *Shaka-*

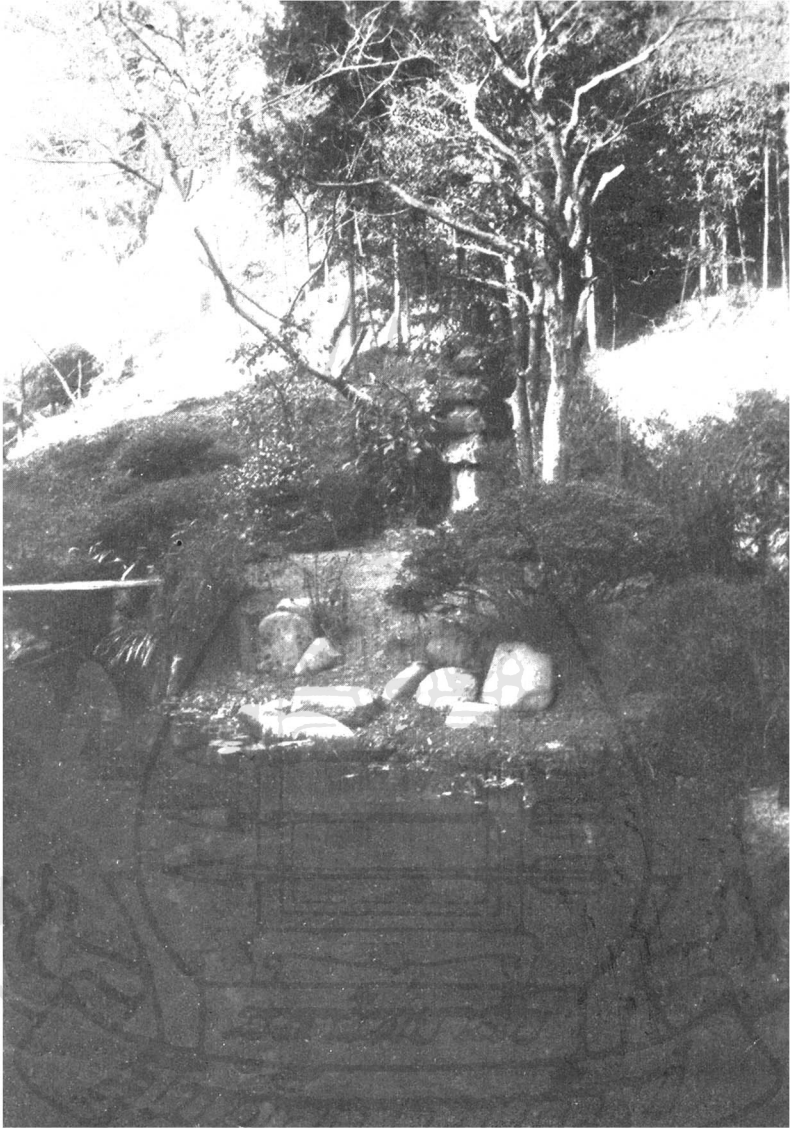
dō, a valuable statue of the Buddha being enshrined therein: the original wooden pillars are said to remain intact, and still support the little building.

Upon the island in the lake stands a moss-encrusted stone pagoda. According to tradition this was erected in remote times by a wealthy man of Yui (the district adjoining the sea-shore), to commemorate the tragic fate of his baby-girl, who was carried away by an eagle: the bereaved parent is said to have established several of these memorial stones in various parts of Kamakura.

Behind the tomb of Ichiman is a fire-proof building containing the temple's most important treasures. These include an ancient statue of the Buddha said to have been carved by the famous Chinese sculptor-priest Chin-wakei; a picture of Buddha painted by Nichiren, and various other prized objects. The building near the residence of the priests is a large guest-hall, containing a high altar and attractively decorated.

On the left-hand side of the Gate of the Kings steps lead up to the temple graveyard, wherein are divers mossed and ancient tombs. However the central monument, of polished marble, marks the passing of a modern hero (1916), and is reared above the ashes of Admiral Kamimura—the distinguished commander who played such an effective rôle in the Russo-Japan war (1904–05), and who was a devoted adherent of the Nichiren doctrines.

A short distance beyond the first tiled gate of this foundation a path ascends to a space in the hill-side, enshrouded by trees and dedicated to the days of legend. Beside the green waters of a small deep lake stands a little temple—*Yakushi-Myōjin*, or 'Shrine to allay the Sufferings of the Serpent.'



Lake of Myōhonji.

With a moss-encrusted stone pagoda; memorial to the babe of ancient days that was carried away by an eagle

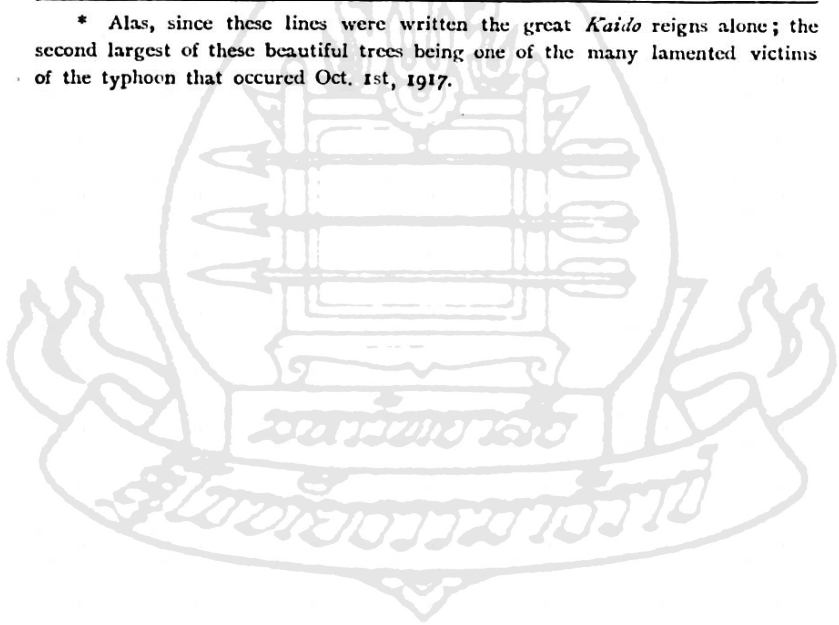
On the fatal day of Sept. 2nd, 1203, the despairing Wakasa-no-Tsuboné is said to have drowned herself in this pond, when her spirit assumed the guise of a dragon: moreover, according to ancient chronicles, the ghostly inhabitant of its depths entered the young daughter of Hōjō Masamune causing the possessed girl deep anguish. At the request of Wakasa's brother, Daigaku Saburo, Nichiren recited the scriptures and prayed for the lost soul on the banks of this lake. The demon was exorcised. In the watches of the night Wakasa appeared to the saint in joy and gratitude that by virtue of his intercession her spirit was liberated from its tortures to ascend to the regions of the blest: the apparition averred that for all eternity her ghost would hover around this sacred spot, to protect the temple from malign influences—hence the redeemed soul came to be deified as *Fakushi Myōjin*.

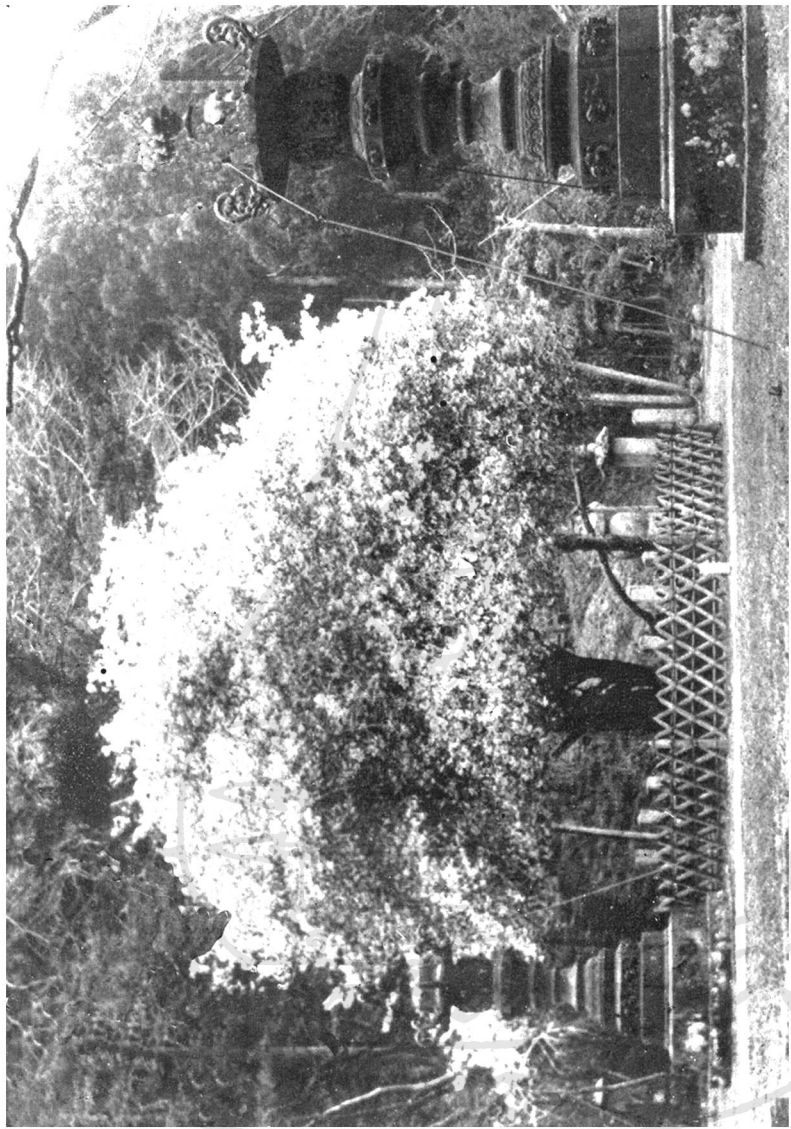
Near the lake (*Fagyo-no-iké*, or 'Pond of the Dragon') is a spring of extreme antiquity, sheltered by a roof: this is the Dragon's Well (*Fagyo-no-i*), so-called from the following tradition. In the course of a civil war that was being waged in the Era of *Oei* (1394-1427), for protective purposes a priest of the temple—Nichigyo by name—is said to have concealed beneath its waters a holy figure that had been bestowed by the deified Wakasa: during this period if any person ventured to approach the well with the intention of drawing water, the dragon appeared—putting the alarmed intruder to flight; moreover evil befel them.

On either side of the main temple are the famous *Kaido* (*Pyrus spectabilis*)—the right-hand specimen being a veritable giant of its species, which as a rule does not attain to large proportions. Towards mid-April, when

these great bushes are in full bloom, numerous visitors assemble to admire the enchanting effect of the billowing masses of pale-pink and crimson blossom, that transforms the austere dignity of this usually solitary courtyard into a vision of fairyland.* A track on the north ascends somewhat steeply to the summit of the hills above the temple, which are intersected with paths and command views on all sides of quite exceptional beauty, through the boles and drooping boughs of the magnificent old pines. In November the numerous scarlet maples invest the landscape with a brilliant note of colour. An easy and picturesque descent on the eastern side leads down into the valley of *Matsuba-ga-yatsu*, rendering it unnecessary to return by the same route.

* Alas, since these lines were written the great *Kaido* reigns alone; the second largest of these beautiful trees being one of the many lamented victims of the typhoon that occurred Oct. 1st, 1917.





The Great Kaidō of Myōhonji in full bloom.